

Message Text

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FOLLOWING REPEAT BEIRUT 2166 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO ALGIERS,
AMMAN, DAMASCUS, GENEVA, JERUSALEM, JIDDA, KUWAIT, MOSCOW &
TEL AVIV DATED 21 FEB 1974:

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UNCLAS BEIRUT 2166

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

POUCHED BAGHDAD AND CAIRO

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR MILI SYIS XF

SUBJ: SYRIAN PRESIDENT VIEWS ME PEACE PROSPECTS

SUMMARY: IN LENGTHY INTERVIEW CARRIED HERE IN INDEPENDENT
AL BAYRAQ FEB 21, SYRIAN PRES ASSAD DISCUSSED
REGAINING TERRITORY LOST TO ISRAEL, RETURN OF
POW'S, LIFTING OF OIL EMBARGO, AND HARMONIOUS NATURE
OF HIS RELATIONS WITH PRES SADAT AND SECRETARY
KISSINGER. HE ALSO DISCUSSED SYRIAN INTERNAL SITUATION
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AND FORECAST CONTINUED WAR IF GENEVA TALKS FAIL. HE MADE

NO DIRECT REFERENCE TO SECRETARY'S UPCOMING VISIT TO DAMASCUS. END SUMMARY.

1. ACCORDING TO BAYRAQ, ASSAD TOLD PAPER'S EDITOR GRIDOLKARAM HE HAD NOT DELEGATED ANYONE TAKING PART IN RECENT ARAB MINI-SUMMIT MEETING IN ALGIERS, INCLUDING FONMINS SAQQAF AND FAHMI, TO CONVEY SARG PROPOSALS TO USG IN WASHINGTON. HE ALSO DENIED HAVING ASKED USG FOR "ADDITIONAL GUARANTEES" RE "PRESSURES" IT PREPARED EXERT ON ISRAEL TO ENSURE IDF WITHDRAWAL FROM GOLAN HTS. ASSAD SAID ISRAEL WILL EVENTUALLY BE FORCED TO WITHDRAW, NO MATTER HOW UNWILLINGLY, FROM GOLAN "EVEN IF WE HAVE TO WAGE HUNDREDS OF WARS FOR THAT PURPOSE". "THERE CAN BE NO FOOLING AROUND ON THIS SUBJ," HE SAID, "BECAUSE WE WILL GO TO WAR TWENTY TIMES OVER TO LIBERATE GOLAN OR ANY OTHER ARAB TERRITORY." AS FOR REPORTS RE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW ISRAELI TOWN IN GOLAN, "WE WILL DESTROY THIS TOWN REGARDLESS OF EFFORTS MADE BY ISRAEL TO CONSTRUCT IT."

2. ASKED ABOUT CONDITION OF ISRAELI POW'S HELD BY SYRIA, ASSAD RESPONDED: "WE HAVE NOT CUT OFF THEIR EARS, KILLED THEM, OR SET DOGS UPON THEM AS THE ISRAELIS CLAIM. WE HAVE TREATED THEM IN MANNER THAT SURPASSES PROVISIONS OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS." HE CLAIMED SARG OBSERVING GENEVA ACCORDS IN CONTRAST TO GOI VIOLATION OF PROVISIONS RE TREATMENT OF CIVILIANS IN OCCUPIED LANDS. ASSAD PLEDGED "WE NOT ONLY PREPARED TO RELEASE NAMES OF POW'S, BUT THE PRISONERS AS WELL IF ISRAEL OBSERVES GENEVA ACCORDS. IF ISRAEL ALLOWS RETURN OF ALL 170,000 SYRIAN REFUGEES FROM GOLAN, WE BECOME COMMITTED TO RELEASE POW'S." ASSAD REPORTEDLY LAUGHED AT SUGGESTION SOVS PRESSURING SARG TO RELEASE POW LIST, OBSERVING NO EXTERNAL FORCE CAN PRESSURE SYRIAN REGIME, ALTHOUGH NOTING "WE AND RUSSIANS ARE FRIENDS AND EXCHANGE VIEWS."

3. ON SUBJ OF PALESTINIANS, ASSAD SAID HE FOUND THEIR INTERNAL DISAGREEMENTS TO BE "NATURAL", BUT HOPED THAT WITH HELP OF OTHER ARABS THEY COULD "CEMENT THEIR UNITY". HE ADDED SINGLE PERFUNCTORY REMARK ABOUT SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR PALESTINIANS IN RECOVERING THEIR LAND AND "FULL UNCLASSIFIED

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RIGHTS". ASSAD ALSO DENIED IRAQI MILITARY UNITS HAD WITHDRAWN FROM SYRIA ON SARG INSISTENCE, OBSERVING ALL ARAB ARMIES ARE WELCOME IN SYRIA AND IRAQI WITHDRAW AT OWN INITIATIVE. SAID MOROCCAN, KUWAITI, AND SAUDI TROOPS REMAIN IN SYRIA.

4. THROUGHOUT INTERVIEW ASSAD REFUSED TO BE BAITED INTO POLEMICS AGAINST PRES SADAT OR SECRETARY KISSINGER.

HE DENIED REPORT THAT LATEST SADAT-KISSINGER TALKS HAD LEFT SYRIA ISOLATED, OR THAT SADAT HAD SPOKEN IN HIS STEAD. HE INSISTED THAT, CONTRARY TO RUMOR, "SADAT IS MY FRIEND AND NO DISAGREEMENT EXISTS BETWEEN US." ASKED IF SADAT HAD GIVEN COMMITMENTS TO US RE LIFTING OF OIL EMBARGO, DISENGAGEMENT OF ISRAELI AND SYRIAN FORCES, AND PRISONER REPATRIATION, ASSAD SAID EGYPTIAN PRES "WOULD NEVER DO SUCH THINGS WITHOUT CONSULTING US. ALL ATTEMPTS TO INCITE ONE OF US AGAINST THE OTHER WILL BE IN VAIN." HE ALSO DENIED KISSINGER HAD "TALKED DOWN" TO HIM, OBSERVING THAT HAD THEIR TALKS NOT BEEN CONDUCTED IN "NORMAL CLIMATE", THEY WOULD NOT HAVE CONTINUED. "ON THE CONTRARY," ASSAD AFFIRMED, "SECRETARY KISSINGER IS ADROIT--THAT HE IS US SECRETARY OF STATE IS SUFFICIENT WITNESS TO THAT."

5. ASSAD DESCRIBED SARG RELATIONS WITH JORDAN AS "NORMAL" AND KING FEISAL'S POLICIES AS "SOUND". QUESTIONED ABOUT RUMORS OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN FEISAL AND PRES NIXON RE POSTPONEMENT OF TRIPOLI OIL CONF AND LIFTING OF OIL EMBARGO, HE REPLIED THAT SYRIA PRODUCES NO OIL AND THEREFORE IS IN NO POSITION TO COMMENT ON SUCH MATTERS. ALL QUESTIONS ON THIS SUBJ, HE ADDED, SHOULD BE REFERRED TO KING FEISAL OR PRES NIXON. (KARAM REPORTS, NONETHELESS, THAT "SOURCES CLOSE TO ASSAD "SAY HE BELIEVES OIL EMBARGO SHOULD CONTINUE.)

6. RE SYRIAN STANCE VIS-A-VIS GENEVA PEACE CONF, ASSAD LIMITED HIMSELF TO SAYING: "WE HAVE CLARIFIED OUR POSITION AND WILL STICK TO IT." HE STATED SYRIAN POPULATION IS ACCUSTOMED TO ECONOMIC HARDSHIP BROUGHT ABOUT BY WAR EFFORT AND THAT SARG IS PREPARED TO RESUME FIGHTING IF CONF FAILS. SAID RUMORS OF DIFFERENCES AMONG SYRIAN

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BAATHIST LEADERSHIP ON THESE ISSUES ARE "FABRICATIONS".

7. COMMENT: WE FIND IT PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY THAT ASSAD, IN PUBLICLY EXPRESSING SYRIAN CONDITIONS FOR RELEASE OF ISRAELI PRISONERS FOR FIRST TIME, DEMANDED NOT ONLY RETURN OF 20,000 SYRIAN REFUGEES EVACUATED DURING OCT WAR, BUT ALSO FOR RETURN OF THOSE WHO LEFT GOLAN IN COURSE OF 1967 WAR AS WELL. WE SURMISE THIS CONDITION IS AIMED AT HEADING OFF GOI'S RECENTLY ANNOUNCED PLAN TO SETTLE ADDITIONAL ISRAELIS IN GOLAN AREA, BUT IT PROBABLY ALSO VIEWED BY ASSAD AS DEVICE THAT WOULD LINK SYRIAN-ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT MORE CLOSELY TO EVENTUAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM AREA SEIZED IN 1967. HOUGHTON UNQTE RUSH

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